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Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 SSO-00 INRE-00 NSCE-00
USIE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03
NSAE-00 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ACDA-12 CCO-00 /085 W
----------044259 181419Z /47
O 181300Z MAR 78
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7157
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY JIDDA IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY TELAVIV IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY PARIS IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM IMMEDIATE
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 1468

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, LE, US
SUBJ: SOUTH LEBANON: DISCUSSION WITH FRENCH COUNSELOR

1. COUNSELOR OF FRENCH EMBASSY IN BEIRUT, FERDNAND DE LAVERGNEE, CALLED ON DCM MARCH 17. HE SAID THAT HIS EMBASSY WAS FOLLOWING EVENTS IN SOUTH LEBANON VERY CLOSELY AND WISHED TO COOPERATE FULLY WITH USG AND UK IN TRYING TO FIND A SOLUTION TO PRESENT PROBLEM IN SOUTH LEBANON. HE MENTIONED (WITH SOME EMBARRASSMENT) THAT BECAUSE OF IMMINENCE OF FRENCH ELECTIONS, GOF HAD PERHAPS NOT THUS FAR BEEN ABLE TO MAKE THE KINDS OF STATEMENTS THAT WERE EXPECTED OF IT IN SOME QUARTERS. HE ALSO NOTED THAT GOF WAS UNDER CONSIDERABLE CONFLICTING PRESSURE; ISRAELIS HAD FORMALLY REQUESTED CLOSURE OF PLO OFFICE IN PARIS WHILE ARAB DIPLOMATIC CORPS IN PARIS, LED BY ITS ALGERIAN DEAN,
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HAD MADE JOINT DEMARCHE TO FRENCH FOREIGN MINISTER CALLING ON FRANCE TO CONDEMN ISRAELI AGGRESSION IN SOUTH LEBANON AND DEMAND IMMEDIATE ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL. (BEIRUT PRESS MARCH 18 ANNOUNCED THAT GOL HAD RECALLED ITS AMBASSADOR IN PARIS FOR CONSULTATION CONCERNING THE FRENCH POSITION ON THE "ISRAELI AGRESSION AGAINST LEBANON").

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2. DE LAVERGNEE'S ANALYSIS OF CURRENT SITUATION IN SOUTH LEBANON WAS VERY CLOSE TO OURS. HE SAID THAT ISRAELIS WOULD HAVE TO WITHDRAW AND THAT BEST SOLUTION WOULD BE TO HAVE LEBANESE ARMY REPLACE THEM. HOWEVER, HE DOUBTED LAF, IN ITS PRESENT STATE, WAS UP TO THEJOB. HE MENTIONED IN PASSING THAT FRENCH EMBASSY HAD HEARD A RUMOR THAT LAF COMMANDER GENERAL KHOURY WOULD SOON BE REPLACED BY FORMER CHIHABIST G-2 GABY LAHOUD, AT SYRIA'S REQUEST. HE SAW NO ALTERNATIVE TO A UN FORCE IN THE SHORT TERM, TO ESTABLISH SECURITY IN THE BORDER REGION WHEN ISRAELIS WITHDREW. IN RESPONSE TO DCM'S QUESTION, DE LAVERGNEE NOTED THAT FRENCH WOULD PPROBABLY BE WILLING TO PARTICIPATE IN SUCH A FORCE AND REFERRED TO PRESIDENT GISCARD D'ESTAING'S PREVIOUS REMARKS IN THIS SENSE. HE NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT IF FRENCH TROOPS WERE INVOLVED IN POLICING A TEN KILOMETER SECURITY ZONE NORTH OF THE ISRAELI-LEBANESE BORDER, THEY WOULD INSIST THAT PALESTINIANS WITHDRAW NOT JUST FROM THIS AREA BUT NORTH OF THE LITANI. DCM REMARKED THAT THIS, IN OUR VIEW, WAS ONE OF THE MAJOR PROBLEMS WE FACED: WHO WAS GOING TO POLICE THE PALESTINIANS IN THE AREA BETWEEN THE SECURITY ZONE AND THE LITANI?

3. COMMENT: ONCE THEIR ELECTIONS ARE OVER, FRENCH MAY BE ABLE TO PLAY A HELPFUL AND INFLUENTIAL ROLE IN LEBANON. WE RECOMMEND THAT USG CONSULT CLOSELY WITH GOF AS WELL AS UKG IN COMING DAYS, PARTICULARLY ON QUESTION OF PREPARATION
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OF LEBANESE ARMY TO GO TO THE SOUTH, A MATTER ON WHICH FRENCH COOPERATION COULD BE USEFUL.
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Disposition Approved on Date:
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